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ABSTRACT

Effective materials for televised instruction are most likely to result from the coordinated efforts of a team of capable specialists. Composition of the team may be influenced by local variables, but the group should normally include (1) an instructional designer who develops an overall scheme in which interrelated parts of an instructional process are organized in a sequential pattern; (2) a content specialist who takes the lead in the selection of goals, objectives, concepts, and content, and in the structuring of learning experiences; (3) a writer who converts to script form the results of all the planning, instructional designing, content research, and communication strategy that are the products of team efforts and interaction; (4) a production specialist who is responsible for using the script, talent, materials, and tools and techniques of television production to serve the instructional purposes of the project; (5) a specialist in technical television who facilitates operations through adapting, devising and making available television equipment, facilities, and technical services; and (6) a specialist in research and evaluation who devises, conducts, and interprets formative research and summative evaluation procedures. Interaction among the specialists is likely to produce materials that are more creative, more soundly based, and more effective than if the same individuals had worked independently. Such a team provides a substantial improvement over the usual evolutionary procedure in which individuals become involved only when needs or problems become apparent. (HOD)

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A Plan For A Team Approach To Instructional Television Production*

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A Plan For A Team Approach To Instructional Television Production

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Abstract

Effective materials for televised instruction are most likely to result from the coordinated efforts of a team of capable specialists. This article describes the role and the contributions of each key member and the interaction that should occur. Composition of the team may be influenced by local variables, but the group should normally include an instructional designer, content authorities, a writer, a producer-director, television engineer, and a researcher. Such a team provides a substantial improvement over the usual evolutionary procedure in which individuals become involved when needs or problems become apparent. The notable significance of the team approach lies both in the inclusion of specialists whose services are too often neglected or ill-used and in the timely interaction of creative personnel.

The first extensive use of a specialist team approach to the planning and production of educational television programs was by the Children's Television Workshop in 1968 [1, p. 43]. A system of team interaction between formative researchers and the creative staff of writers, producers and directors was developed during the preparation of the Sesame Street series. An even more clear-cut version of the team approach was instituted by the British Open University in 1970 [2, p. 125]. An OU course team consists of the academic staff, educational technologists, BBC producers, and various support personnel. The Agency for Instructional Television has evolved a system of separate teams responsible for such functions as curriculum design, community awareness, and utilization [3, p. 48]. The University of Mid-America and the National University Consortium for Telecommunications utilize course teams patterned after the British Open University example. Although the specialist team approach has been in use, however limited, for over ten years, the concept has received less attention than it deserves in the

literature. All those who may become involved in the preparation of television programs for educational use should be aware of the nature and advantages of the specialist team. This is a basic plan and rationale for a specialist team approach to the development of an instructional television project.

Effective materials for televised instruction are most likely to result from the coordinated efforts of a team of capable specialists. During the planning and production of the video, audio and print components of televised instruction the need for certain specially trained personnel tends to become obvious. However, the identity and functions of other specialists who could make important contributions are frequently overlooked, oversimplified, or perceived too late. Such oversights and misjudgments can seriously cripple opportunities for optimum achievement of educational objectives. There is a need for improved understanding of the several basic roles in the specialist team, their interrelationships, and their possible contributions.

Six key roles are important to achieving the most effective design, preparation and production of materials for televised instruction. These roles require the services of specialists who are properly trained and experienced in their particular areas. It is possible that a single individual may fill more than one role. Such combinations may prove to be disadvantageous, however, because of the neglect that one or another role may suffer. The specialist team or task force assigned to the organization and development of an instructional television

project should include:

(1) a specialist in instructional design
(2) one or more content specialists
(3) a writer
(4) a television production specialist (producer-director)
(5) a specialist in technical television
(6) a specialist in research and evaluation

This group constitutes a minimum selection of team participants in any extensive project aiming for results comparable to the most effective instructional TV series now in use. Depending on the scale of the project, several instructional designers may be engaged, several content authorities, several writers, or several researchers may be involved. There may be recognized need for a utilization specialist on the team, or one or more classroom teachers may be included.

The Role of the Specialist in Instructional Design.

This team member should be competent in two distinct but closely related fields: instructional design and the psychology of learning. Instructional design involves the development of an overall scheme in which interrelated parts of an instructional process are organized in a sequential pattern. Kemp catches the essence of instructional design when he says, "It means the systematic design of instruction, based on knowledge of the learning process and on communications theory, taking into consideration as many factors and variables of the particular situation as possible"[4, p. 7]. One of the most important benefits of the team approach is that it creates a

situation which is eminently favorable to the application of instructional design principles and the use of formative research.

Using the instructional design approach to the preparation of instructional TV materials involves organized progression in deciding what the goals and objectives are to be; conducting pre-assessments to determine the important characteristics and entry level of the target audience; associating specific subject matter with specific objectives; selecting teaching strategy and activities; preparation of materials; and evaluation of results. Instructional design schemes exist with numerous variations, but the basic features and systematic approach remain essentially the same. The concept of instructional design is in itself something relatively new to many educational broadcasters. The past ten years have seen the growth of an increasing number of university training programs for instructional designers or educational technologists. Specialized training is desirable, but others can apply the principles and approach of instructional design after doing some intensive professional reading.

This specialist should lead the team in the review, interpretation, and application of relevant principles derived from learning theory. Although there are frustrating gaps in the body of knowledge concerning the nature and conditions of learning, it is seldom that state-of-the-art theory and practice are adequately reviewed in the process of preparing a television teaching series. The best information available about how people learn should be brought to bear in the design of all project

materials and procedures.

Research has long ago produced satisfactory evidence that people can and do learn from television and that learning occurs in amount and rate comparable to results obtained with more conventional teaching procedures. However, the means by which television is best able to bring about learning are not thoroughly researched or well understood. Under the pressure of production deadlines it is easy to fall back on the comfortable assumption that whatever teaching practices are familiar will be adequate for the television presentation. Unfortunately, the development of better methods and materials is slow and uncertain under such a philosophy. Televised instruction gives rise to new possibilities and new problems which are a challenge to the most competent student of learning theory. To launch forth without the guidance of a specialist in this area is to be sailing without the services of navigation. Learning with the assistance of television is, after all, learning. There is no justification for any assumption that the charisma of the medium or the technology of TV production can abridge the basic principles of human learning.

As an expert in the psychology of learning the instructional designer should provide counsel on such questions as:

(1) What goals and objectives are appropriate?

(2) What motivations, appeals and interests should be utilized with this particular target audience?

(3) What should be the progression or sequencing of elements and content?

(4) What factors can contribute to comprehension and cognition?

(5) What devices should be used to aid retention?

(6) What is the activity-eliciting potential of certain content and procedures?

It should be recognized here that formative research, organized by the research specialist, may be called upon to address such questions as these and to determine which of several choices is the best in the given situation.

With the best of current practice and the relevant principles of learning reviewed and development of the instructional design under way, the content specialists and the writer can proceed with detailed subject matter selection and script preparation.

The Role of the Content Specialist.

This specialist should function as a key participant from the earliest stages of developing the instructional design. It may mean taking the lead in the selection of goals, objectives, concepts and content, and in the structuring of learning experiences. In matters relating to what is taught, the accuracy, authenticity and up-to-dateness of content, this team member is likely to be the principal authority. More than one content authority is often desirable, and the actual script writing may indeed be done by a content specialist. Frequently, a content authority may prove to be the most effective on-camera talent.

The content specialist may or may not have previous experience in working with the television medium. One advantage of the team approach is that each person can make his own unique contribution,

and the combined group constitutes a complete working unit with depth capabilities functioning in each essential area.

Attention now turns to the selection of format, content, metaphor ahd presentational devices. The content specialist and the writer must work together with the highest level of cooperation. Each program must be outlined. Nature, quantity and complexity of content must be decided upon within the bounds of the instructional design and other recognized constraints. Keeping in mind the nature of the audience, the realities of production, the limitations of the talent, and guidelines from learning theory, content-related decisions must be made concerning ways of arousing and holding interest, achieving comprehension and retention, and eliciting desired response. Input from other team members, the instructional designer, the production specialist and the formative researcher, may now become especially important. It will also be remembered that the on-camera talent will be putting into play their own insights and techniques as communicators as well as applying the strategies and tactics built into the script.

The Role of the Writer.

The writer as a team member converts to script form the results of all the planning, instructional designing, content research, and communication strategy that are the products of team efforts and interaction. The particular expertise of the writer should include the ability to write clear-minded conversational style copy; a familiarity with the conventions of television script writing; skill in employing the formats and communication strategies

known to the broadcast medium; ability to think visually; a lively imagination; a flair for innovation; and a way with words. In addition to the basic skills and qualities of a versatile and experienced writer, this team member, like the others, will have the background knowledge acquired as a participant in team deliberations from the start of project planning throughout the stages of design development.

The writer is responsible for preparing script treatments outlining the nature and content of each program, writing the rough drafts, and eventually the polished scripts. Supplementary materials to accompany the series are also likely to be part of the writer's work. These may include a series manual, utilization guide, self-instruction materials for the students, test banks, and other types of printed materials. Development of the print materials should be a responsibility strongly shared with a utilization specialist. Throughout all these efforts, the closest cooperation between the writer and other team members and resource people is essential for the best use of specialized skills and information.

The Role of the Production Specialist.

This specialist is responsible for employing the script, the talent, the materials, and the tools and techniques of television production to serve the instructional purposes of the project. More than anyone else on the team this individual functions as the "television expert." As a producer-director this team member becomes the supervising coordinator of all the elements of television production as he prepares for his ultimate task of directing actual

production. Often the producer functions and the director functions are the provinces of two different individuals since both are extensive and distinct areas of activity. Finally, it is timely to emphasize the fact that there must be a leader for the specialist team. One of the most logical choices for this responsibility is the television producer, who in his proper role as coordinator of production services comes close to being a general supervisor of the project anyway. Nevertheless, any team member or a coordinator from outside the group can take on the role of project leader.

As the expert on the methods, materials, resources, performance and presentation techniques for television, the production specialist is one of the most obviously useful members of the team. Others may say what objectives should be achieved and through what experiences, but the question of how to do that job via television is one that is willingly placed in the hands of the production specialist. It is proper that he should share in the deliberations concerning instructional design and the use of resources. His familiarity with the objectives, strategy and content of the programs should date back to the earliest phases of team planning. The production specialist must be prepared to adapt to television those materials and techniques with which the teacher has long been familiar. Cleverness and judgment in adapting and innovating for the television medium is, of course, one of the most important contributions of the production specialist.

In addition to his constant counseling with other members of the team, the producer-director must attend to an infinite

number of details involved in the physical preparations for production. As plans and scripts become definite, arrangements must be made to have ready and quality-approved all the many materials and facilities needed for production. Talent must be selected, trained, rehearsed and infused with enthusiasm and confidence. In the preparation of materials and content the production man has functioned as a craftsman and a communication strategist; in the training and handling of talent and personnel he has been both a teacher and a diplomat; but when preparations have reached their final form and he steps into the control room as director, the time has arrived for him to become an artist.

The Role of the Specialist in Technical Television.

This specialist is to facilitate operations through adapting, devising and making available television equipment, facilities and technical services which will be of the greatest possible assistance in achieving the educational objectives. In the public TV station factors of internal communication, rapport, and most effective use of available technical skills and facilities make early involvement of the engineering staff a profitable consideration.

Not every project in televised instruction would seem to require the direct services of a television engineer during the planning stages. It is recognized that the properly qualified production specialist will be well informed concerning the potentialities of equipment and the operation of the television system. Nevertheless, the technical field is one of the most highly specialized areas of television. The television engineer is certainly the one best

able to judge as to whether or not he can assist in a given undertaking. In general, those who initiate projects are more likely to underestimate than to overestimate the likelihood and value of contributions and suggestions that might be made by a television engineer.

The utility of contributions made in the conference room and in the workshop are not the only measures of value. There is yet another benefit to be realized from interaction with the engineering staff. The more perceptively the technical staff understands the aims, procedures and problems of instructional planning, the more effectively the technical facilities will be brought into service. This is in part an affair of esprit de corps and in part a matter of understanding the nature and overtones of the job to be done.

The Role of the Specialist in Research and Evaluation.

This specialist is to devise, conduct and interpret formative research and summative evaluation procedures which will assist in the design, improvement and appraisal of instructional materials and activities.

It is important that the research specialist should share in the earliest planning conferences. To be in the best position to organize services and design instruments and procedures the researcher needs full information and insights concerning the target audience and the principles, objectives, and methods which are expected to enter into the total plan. The possible functions

of research should be discussed at the outset of the project in order that opportunities for service will not be missed, plans can be laid, and time allowed for the collection, processing and utilization of data.

Formative research procedures may be employed to great advantage during planning and preparation stages to determine the proper choice from among available content, materials, techniques or segments. Formative research renders service in pre-assessment and can rise to major importance in resolving decision-making dilemmas of the instructional designer, content specialist, writer and director. "Guess-work" can be reduced by pre-testing. When pre-testing or pilot testing activities are required, adequate time must be allowed for all research procedures to be completed and findings reported when other team members need that information.

The research specialist should recognize a responsibility for constructing research reports that will be most meaningful to those who should profit from the findings. A judiciously detailed and relatively non-technical interpretation of research results, accompanied by suggestions for applying those findings, is the kind of research report needed to provide answers of immediate value. The research specialist should be as faithful in facilitating the understanding and application of his findings as he is in seeking new research techniques and challenges.

The Specialist Team: Greater Than the Sum of Its Parts.

Six areas of specialization have been identified as important in a team approach to televised instruction projects. They provide depth of expertise and diversity of perspective. These six roles are significant both individually and in combination. Somehow the team becomes greater than the sum of its parts. Interaction among the specialists is likely to produce materials which are more creative, more soundly-based and effective than if the same individuals had worked independently. This observation is in no way meant to deny the value of solitary creative and analytical thinking. Individual work would normally proceed as a complementary and parallel part of teamwork activity.

The specialist team approach offers a substantial improvement over the more common evolutionary procedure in which specialists may become involved one by one when needs become apparent. Both television production and teaching are activities of considerable complexity. When joined together in a common undertaking they deserve no less than the most systematic attention of those who can contribute to maximum educational effectiveness.

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